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AMMON'S ARMY

INSIDE THE FAR-RIGHT "PEOPLE'S RIGHTS" NETWORK



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A SPECIAL REPORT BY THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH & EDUCATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE
MONTANA HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK.

INTRODUCTION

"ARE YOU READY FOR CIVIL WAR NOVEMBER 4"

--Tony Pellegrino, People's Rights [1]

**SEIZING ON COVID-19 ANXIETY,
AMMON BUNDY AND HIS ALLIES
HAVE CULTIVATED A DANGEROUS
NEW NETWORK OF MILITIA
MEMBERS, ANTI-MASKERS,**

CONTENTS

ONE: INTRODUCTION |
POINT OF THE SPEAR

TWO: UNCOVERING THE
PEOPLE'S RIGHTS NETWORK

THREE: THE ONLINE ARMY

ARMY OF FOLLOWERS—AMMON'S ARMY.

This report by the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights and the Montana Human Rights Network explores the breadth and depth of the network built by Bundy and named “People’s Rights.” What started in late March with a few dozen supporters in a rural Idaho warehouse has swiftly expanded to a membership base of over twenty thousand across the country.

Relying on field reports, countless hours of video footage, interviews, archival material, and a massive trove of online data, report researchers have captured the first full picture of Ammon’s army.

Data presented in this report suggests that the rapid growth of the People’s Rights network has been spurred by a fusion of Bundy’s core of the far-right paramilitary supporters built up over years of armed standoffs with a mass base of new activists radicalized in protest over COVID-19 health directives.

The leadership of the People’s Rights network has remained hidden, locked away inside a new online platform away from public scrutiny, until now.

FIVE: THE POSSE RIDES AGAIN

SIX: MIDDLE AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD NATIONALISM

SEVEN: CONSPIRACIES AND ANTISEMITISM UNBOUNDED

EIGHT: PEOPLES RIGHTS AND RACISM

NINE: ANTI-INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM

TEN: POLITICAL POWER

ELEVEN: PREPPING FOR THE FUTURE

TWELVE: NOTABLE NETWORK FIGURES

THIRTEEN: CONCLUSION

states. This report, for the first time, names all 153 of those activists and examines their backgrounds—including extensive far-right activism by many area assistants. Though the national and state leadership is still dominated by men, this report also documents how People's Rights has a majority of women in local leadership positions—a first for modern far-right networks.

This report also details how People's Rights carved up the country into local areas. It maps the locations of the more than twenty thousand members of the People's Rights network. It also dives into the data collected by report researchers on the composition of the online membership base of the twenty-two different People's Rights Facebook groups that helped accelerate the spread of the network. The report digs into the new online platform developed by People's Rights, a way to communicate with activists in case of de-platforming by major social networks.

The results of this study contravene many of the myths surrounding the People's Rights network. Instead of a more traditional “anti-government” narrative, People's Rights leaders have expressed a desire for governmental power to be used to

others. Several People's Rights leaders are running for elected office—to *become* the government. Absent that sort of intervention, leaders have proposed a type of armed enclave-style “neighborhood” nationalism, where “righteous” neighbors stand against the “wicked.” People's Rights leaders have often defined the “wicked” using far-right conspiracism, racism, antisemitism, anti-indigenous, and anti-transgender sentiment.

Despite the different network branding, this report further highlights how the People's Rights network shares many commonalities with far-right paramilitary movements of the past, including the Posse Comitatus and the militia movement.

Throughout the report, the danger of Ammon's army becomes evident. Already there have been significant clashes and growing rage. In the context of the pandemic, it puts the lives of community members and public servants at risk, straining democratic institutions, and damaging civil society. We hope this report will serve as an alert to all communities in the path of Ammon's army.

POINT OF THE SPEAR

AMMON BUNDY AND THE MALHEUR ARMED OCCUPATION

The origins of the People's Rights network and the insurrection against COVID-19 restrictions can be traced back four years to the snow-swept terrain of the southeast Oregon high desert. For all the recent viral far-right misinformation claiming “antifa” started wildfires across the West, it's important to remember that the 2016 armed takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon began as a rally supporting two ranchers convicted of arson wildfires on federal land.

Rancher Dwight Hammond Jr., and his son, Steven, were convicted of starting a 2001 wildfire on federal land, allegedly to cover up illegal deer poaching. Steven Hammond “handed out ‘Strike Anywhere’ matches with instructions that they be lit and dropped on the ground because they were going to ‘light up the whole country on fire.’”^[2] Steven Hammond was also convicted of a 2006 arson in a national wildlife refuge.

When the Hammonds were ordered to serve their full sentences, militia members, Three Percenters, Tea Partiers, and other so-called “patriots” from across the country converged on Burns, Oregon to protest. Among those in attendance was Ammon Bundy, who had become a larger-than-life movement figure after the 2014 armed standoff at his father's ranch in Nevada. Following a

stand” against federal “tyranny.”[3]

At a press conference during the takeover, Bundy laid out his rationale for seizing the facility as part of a larger crusade to steal public lands.[4] Calling for reinforcements, Bundy declared that they were the “point of the spear that’s going to bring confidence and strength to the rest of the people.”[5] Many, indeed, were emboldened by Bundy’s actions.

After forty days, the armed occupation came to an end with one man dead and more than two dozen occupiers charged with federal offenses. In the legal battle for the Malheur invaders that ensued, Bundy quietly built up a core group of dedicated followers. They helped promote Bundy and did support work for the numerous people who went to trial for involvement in the armed takeover. In the end, the arsonists were pardoned by President Trump, while Ammon Bundy and most of the Malheur militants were freed by the courts. Then along came the COVID-19 pandemic. What was past became prologue as the group of militia members and other far-rightists attracted to the Bundy cause became the nucleus of what would become the People’s Rights network.

FROM MALHEUR TO MASKS

AMMON BUNDY & THE COVID-19 INSURRECTION

spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ammon Bundy started gathering people together to stop them. On March 26, Bundy held an initial meeting in his warehouse in a dusty lot near the railroad tracks in Emmett, Idaho.[\[6\]](#) By that day, a total of 79,785 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the US had been reported, with 1,136 deaths from the virus.[\[7\]](#)

At a germinal gathering of what would become People's Rights on April 2, Ammon Bundy oversaw a meeting where COVID-19 health restrictions dominated the conversation. One participant lamented that "If we knew for sure that 150 million people were going to die that would be tragic and sad and very unfortunate, but that still doesn't trump our freedom and our rights."[\[8\]](#)

There was widespread agreement in the room about the need to change the narrative away from "focusing on the virus" to "focus on our freedoms and our rights."[\[9\]](#)

When the group reconvened a week later, seventy-two people were in attendance to hear Bundy announce the new name for the group and describe how quickly they had grown.

"We have more people here than we had before, and we've started to get organized, so bear with us because it feels like oh man they're not that organized. And we're not. But every day and every week we get more and more organized. We put this in place. We put this in place. And pretty soon we have a body of people that are capable—not just talking about—but capable of defending their liberties because we're uniting. That's what's happening here. So one of the things we've done we've put a way that people can basically join, if you wanna call it that, People's Rights, or whatever you want to call it. And we

During the event, they announced that they would defy the governor's stay-at-home directives and hold an Easter service. Though only about sixty people attended the Easter rally, the defiant disregard for public health drew national attention.[\[11\]](#)

Bundy and People's Rights created a network based on aggressive, belligerent non-compliance with the COVID-19 health directives. Bundy has repeatedly told his crowds, "Do not comply. That is what it will take."[\[12\]](#)

To help slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, like many places the city of Meridian, Idaho, closed playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment (while leaving walking paths open). On April 21, nine days after the Easter protest in nearby Emmett, Sara Walton Brady, leader of the anti-vaxxer group, Idahoans for Vaccine Freedom, staged a protest at a closed playground and was arrested after multiple requests to leave. She broadcast her arrest on social media. In an aggressive response to Walton Brady's arrest, Ammon Bundy and a group of about 40 people protested outside of the arresting police officer's home.[\[13\]](#) One person, who identified themselves as a member of the III% of Idaho, called the Meridian Police Department to demand, "It's time to choose a side. We can't stand what you people do. We will make you abide by the Constitution."[\[14\]](#) The combined actions reaped national attention, another spark to ignite insurrection. Sara Walton Brady became a member of the People's Rights Idaho group, which helped bring anti-vaxxers into the network.

The series of visible confrontations became a rallying cry around the country, setting off a wave of protests that one week later saw heavily-armed militia members storm the Michigan legislative chambers and the governor hung in

From April to September, the number of these groups swelled to 2,100 with 3,032,085 members.^[15]

As attention shifted to the massive number of vocal groups clamoring to reopen the economy in the middle of a pandemic and opposing any sorts of health mandates like wearing masks, Bundy and People's Rights were building an army behind the scenes.



AMMON'S ARMY

INSIDE THE FAR-RIGHT PEOPLE'S
RIGHTS NETWORK

An IREHR / MHRN Special
Report



NEXT

TWO: UNCOVERING THE
PEOPLE'S RIGHTS NETWORK

NOTES

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<https://www.justice.gov/usao-or/pr/eastern-oregon-ranchers-convicted-arson-resentenced-five-years-prison>.

[3] Dickinson, Tim. "WTF is Happening in the Oregon Militia Standoff, Explained." Rolling Stone. January 3, 2016. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/wtf-is-happening-in-the-oregon-militia-standoff-explained-31574/>.

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[9] Ibid.

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[11] Rose, Andy. "Ammon Bundy hosts Easter service despite state order against mass gatherings." CNN. April 12, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-04-12-20/h_78b9b5480ab9bccab1842f64edaf6f29.

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[15] Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights. "Dashboard: New

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IREHR Website, August 20, 2020. <https://www.irehr.org/central-space/>

[/dashboard-new-far-right-groups-on-facebook-protesting-stay-at-home-](#)

[directive/](#)
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